

HARPSWELL BULLETIN

News for Harpswell Residents & Property Owners from the Town Office – April 2006

Town Website: www.harpswell.maine.gov

Elections Update

Harpswell's Annual Town Meeting was held Saturday, March 11, 2006, at Harpswell Islands School. Amy Haible defeated incumbent Lee Theberge by 35 votes (717 to 682) for the three-year term of Selectman, Assessor and Overseer of the Poor. Joanne Rogers, who ran unopposed, was re-elected to a three-year term on the M.S.A.D. # 75 Board of Directors. Michael Webber returns to the post of Road Commissioner, which he held previously for nine years, by defeating Charles Perow, Jr., 1109 to 238. Gordon Weil, current Chairman of the Board of Selectmen, has announced he will resign effective June 13, 2006. A Special Election has been scheduled for that date to fill the remaining nine months of his term.

Annual Town Meeting Update

The municipal budget approved by the voters at the Annual Town Meeting was \$3,658,245, a 3.3% increase over the previous year. Areas contributing to the increase include the rising costs of health insurance, fuel and utilities, and the continuing contractual obligation with Cumberland County for the services of two full-time marine wardens. The Town Meeting did not approve proposals for funding a West Harpswell Library or recreational plans at Mitchell Field. The Mitchell Field sub-committee of the Comprehensive Plan will be working in the upcoming year on developing short and long-term usage plans for the entire site. Voters defeated all articles that would have changed the elected positions of Tax Collector, Town Clerk, Treasurer and Road Commissioner to positions of appointment. The Town Meeting also rejected a proposal to withdraw authorization for the Selectmen to accept the Fuel Depot pipeline easements in Harpswell and Brunswick and then return them to those property owners that would accept them.

Harpswell's SAD # 75 Withdrawal Committee Proposal

As a result of the January 28, 2006 vote, Selectmen were authorized to appoint three people to a 4-person negotiating committee for the purpose of developing the terms of withdrawal from M.S.A.D. # 75. Selectmen agreed to appoint Gordon Weil as the Selectman representative, Lee Theberge as the petitioners' representative and Craig Stephens as the public-at-large member. Dorothy "Dee" Carrier, who serves as a Harpswell member on the SAD # 75 Board of Directors, is the fourth member of Harpswell's Withdrawal Committee.

On March 23, Harpswell's Withdrawal Committee presented its proposal to the public and to M.S.A.D. # 75. The proposal is available in its entirety on the Town's website (See address above). Under the proposed withdrawal agreement, Harpswell will withdraw on June 30, 2007 and tuition in at least 90% of K-12 students for at least 4 years at the state-computed tuition rates. Harpswell tuition money will be available for use in qualifying schools outside the District for up to 10% of K-12 students. The District will continue to operate all schools including those in Harpswell and to provide all related services including transportation and special education. All staff, employees and assets will remain with the District and Harpswell will continue to service its portion of current District debt. Harpswell reserves the right to recover its elementary schools and other assets in the future if and when the tuition arrangement with the Districts ends.

Under the proposal, Harpswell students will continue to attend their usual schools. The District will guarantee that Harpswell students continue to have the same access to programs, services and co-curricular activities and to be treated the same as other students. Harpswell will elect a 5-person School Committee to oversee our relationship with the District. The School Committee will be directly responsible to voters under a new Town ordinance that would need to be adopted by the Town.

Harpswell's Withdrawal Committee wants to hear from the public on issues associated with the terms of withdrawal before formal negotiations begin with M.S.A.D. # 75. A public hearing has been scheduled for Tuesday, April 11, 2006, 7:00 p.m. at Harpswell Islands School. It is expected that by late April, discussions and negotiations between Harpswell's Withdrawal Committee and the District will begin.

When agreement has been reached on the terms of withdrawal, the Withdrawal Agreement will be provided to the Commissioner of Education, who may approve of it or may send it back for further refinement. Once approved by the Commissioner, the voters in Harpswell will be able to make a decision regarding withdrawal. Harpswell voters must approve the Withdrawal Agreement by a 2/3 majority of those voting in order for it to become effective.

Joint Statement Issued by Harpswell Board of Selectmen & M.S.A.D. # 75

As result of the January 28, 2006, Harpswell vote, the Board of Directors of M.S.A.D # 75 and the Town of Harpswell have begun the process of negotiating the terms for Harpswell's possible withdrawal from M.S.A.D. # 75. Both Harpswell and the District will pursue this process conscientiously and constructively, maintaining their common commitment to the high quality for education for students from the four towns of the District.

Because of the requirements established under the Law, this process will take time; and were there to be a final vote in Harpswell in favor of withdrawal, it could not become effective earlier than July 1, 2007 with a change for students, if any, possibly taking place after July 1, 2008.

Conservation Commission Initiatives

▪ Adopt-A-Road Program

The Town's Conservation Commission has spent considerable time developing an "Adopt-A-Road" Program as an organized effort to keep public ways in Harpswell clean. If you are interested in participating, please stop by the Town Office to pick up information about this program. There is an agreement form that must be submitted, safety guidelines to be followed, and a release form to be signed before involvement is authorized.

▪ Sale of Composters

The Conservation Commission continues to promote the practice of composting through the sale of heavy-duty composters offered by Maine Resource Recovery Association. These composters, which cost \$36.50 each, may be purchased at the Harpswell Recycling Center. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of the Conservation Commission, the composters are becoming a common site in Harpswell and have led to the savings of tax dollars by reducing the amount of waste in our waste stream.

Property Tax and Rent Relief for Maine Residents

As part of the Maine legislature's efforts to ease the property tax burden on Maine residents, the 2005 Tax and Rent Refund program has been expanded. More Maine residents than ever before qualify for refunds based on taxes or rent that they paid in 2004. The maximum refund available is \$2,000.

You may qualify for a refund if:

- Your 2004 household income was \$74,500 or less, and you do not have a spouse or dependent(s); or
- Your 2004 household income was \$99,500 or less, and you do have a spouse or dependent(s);

AND

- Your 2004 property tax was more than 4% of your household income; or
- The rent you paid in 2004 was more than 20% of your 2004 household income.

NOTE: Seniors living alone whose incomes are below \$12,400 or those living with a spouse or dependent whose incomes are below \$15,300, do not have to meet the 4% or 20% thresholds.

Town Treasurer Marguerite Kelly has offered her assistance to anyone who needs help with the application. Please do not hesitate to stop in and see her at the Town Office or to call her at 833-5771, extension 122, during morning office hours, if you have any questions or would like any assistance with this program. With the Maine legislature making the "circuit breaker" program available to more Maine residents, the Town would like to provide assistance, if needed, so that those who are entitled to this tax benefit are able to receive it.

Applications must be filed by May 31, 2006.

Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee

The approved 2005 Comprehensive Plan provided the framework for managing the Town's future growth and development with the stated goals of preserving the rural character of the community, enhancing village life, maintaining the Town's diverse population, and providing opportunities for affordable housing. The Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee (CPIC) was formed to begin developing ordinance tools to manage the Town's future growth as directed by the voters. The Committee has been actively working on developing recommendations that will preserve the best of Harpswell while meeting stated goals of the community to accommodate future growth responsibly.

To gather public comment on its proposals, the CPIC will hold neighborhood meetings beginning in May. The Committee seeks public participation to help foster the details that will further refine the proposed ordinance language recommendations. Please attend one of the neighborhood meetings in your area—light refreshments will be provided. A copy of the Comprehensive Plan and related materials are available on the Town's website and at the Town Office.

Meeting Dates and Locations

- May 31, Orr's Island Schoolhouse, 7:00 p.m.
- June 6, Cundy's Harbor Community Building, 7:00 p.m.
- June 14, West Harpswell School, 7:00 p.m.
- June 20, TBA (To Be Announced), 7:00 p.m.

Important Dates

Tuesday, April 11, 7:00 p.m.—Public Hearing on the Harpswell Withdrawal Committee's Proposed Agreement, at Harpswell Islands School

May 1, 2006, Mooring Fees due

- Resident/Non-Resident Taxpayers \$12
- Rentals \$50
- Non-Residents \$60

New Adult Recreation Programs

Coed Volleyball: At West Harpswell School, beginning **April 13**, 5:30-6:30 p.m. Standard volleyball rules apply. No pre-registration required.

Bridge: At the Town Office, starting **April 11**, 1:00 p.m. and continuing on April 18. Additional sessions will be scheduled depending on interest. Residents and non-residents welcome. Knowledge of bridge required. Contact Recreation Director Liz Bouve at harpswellrec@zwi.net or 833-5771.

Are you unsure of how to find services to help a family member, a friend, or yourself? Are you wondering where you can volunteer and make a difference?

Dial 211 or visit www.211maine.org if you want to give help or get help with a full range of health and human services. 2-1-1 Maine, Inc. is a nonprofit organization formed in partnership with United Ways of Maine and Ingraham to develop a health and human services information and referral service system to serve the entire State of Maine, every day and in times of crisis. It is now available in Cumberland County.